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Mr. Graham's Adventures

Billy Graham is one of the great evangelical figures of his time. His contribution to religious experience has been substantial even if he has critics who remain disdainful of his essential idea that religion derives less from the intellect than from the spirit, less from the mind than from the heart.

Fairly recently, however, Mr. Graham has shown a distressing penchant for involvement in the affairs of politics and government. This failing is not unknown among religious leaders, as Bishop Sheen, another great church figure, has reminded us in his recent criticisms of the United States Supreme Court for its decisions against religious exercises in the schools. In any case Mr. Graham diminishes the effectiveness of his own ministry by making highly controversial (and demonstrably naive) pronouncements on foreign policy. At the same time he has been giving the appearance, at least, of dabbling in presidential campaign politics in repeated public praises for Richard M. Nixon, who may very well become the Republican presidential nominee.

In an address to the Southern Baptist Convention, Mr. Graham delivered himself of a blanket indictment of American foreign policy, which he said had been incomprehensible to him for 20 years. Then he plunged headlong into the Vietnam controversy, declaring that the United States should either get in with its full resources or get out. This is the obvious and simple response to the Vietnamese dilemma and in the end the United States may take one direct way or the other. What Mr. Graham left out was the enormous hazards in either case: Abandoning Southeast Asia to Communist China on the one hand, or fighting another war like the Korean war on the other. War on the mainland of Asia is the next-to-last war in which the United States should become engaged.

Mr. Graham went on to draw the inevitable, dreary contrast between a purported policy that has "American soldiers dying 10,000 miles away fighting Communism while at the same time discouraging heroic Cuban exiles who want to throw out Communism 90 miles from our shores."

The United States has done everything short of sending in the Marines to "throw out Communism 90 miles from our shores." The United States was up to its ears in the Bay of Pigs intrigue, and the disastrous outcome gave Washington full reason for reappraising more critically the varied ventures of the Cuban exile organizations. Even now there is some reason to believe that the CIA is giving advice and counsel in recent hit-and-run raids on Cuba, although the State Department may very well be horrified at the thought. Whatever the CIA may be up to, there is nothing to indicate that the United States is not free with its one-way exit visas to any Cuban exiles who are ready to go land in Cuba and fight in the mountains, as Castro fought, to wage the only kind of guerrilla warfare that has real hope for victory.

Mr. Graham's pronouncements on foreign policy serve principally to confuse the issues, even while reminding us of an old, and rather bad, joke about the preacher who had quit preaching and "gone to meddling." Stale as the joke is, it sums up perfectly the adventures of Rev. Billy Graham in foreign policy.